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New York

President:	Ms. Murmokaitė	(Lithuania)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
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	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
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	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Ms. Chávez Colmenares

Agenda

The situation in Liberia

Twenty-ninth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2015/275)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President: As this is the first public meeting of the Security Council for the month of May, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to Her Excellency Mrs. Dina Kawar, Permanent Representative of Jordan, for her service at the helm of the Security Council for the month of April, as well as to her entire team. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Kawar and her delegation for the great diplomatic skill and masterful navigation of the waters of the Security Council that characterized their stewardship last month, a very busy one indeed. On a personal note, it is also a great pleasure to be taking over from a woman ambassador. I believe the fact that she is the first Arab woman ambassador ever to preside over the Security Council is highly significant and symbolic, and a true source of inspiration for all the girls and women in the Middle East.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Liberia

Twenty-ninth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia (S/2015/275)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Liberia to participate in this meeting. On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Benedict Sannoh, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Republic of Liberia.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Karin Landgren, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Liberia and Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Olof Skoog, Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Sweden, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/275, which contains the text of the twenty-ninth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

I now give the floor to Ms. Landgren.

Ms. Landgren: As I speak to developments that have occurred since the period covered by the report of the Secretary-General that is before the Council (S/2015/275), all of Liberia is anticipating this Saturday, 9 May. If no new case has been confirmed by then, the World Health Organization expects to declare Liberia Ebola-free. After almost 14 months spent under the cloud of Ebola, this will be joyful news for the country. And last week, on 30 April, the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response in Liberia closed its doors, transferring residual tasks to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and United Nations agencies. Liberians and their Government, with support from the United Nations and international partners, have gotten firmly ahead of the epidemic. Now all Liberians must remain vigilant.

Even as Liberia launches its post-Ebola recovery, the Government has taken steps towards full assumption of its security responsibilities by 30 June 2016, as mandated by the Council. On 6 March, the Liberian National Security Council endorsed the Government of Liberia Plan for UNMIL Transition, in line with resolution 2190 (2014). This important plan was developed under the leadership of the Minister of Justice with UNMIL support, and through consultations with national security agencies, ministries, the legislature, the judiciary and civil society. Progress against its benchmarks and timelines is being monitored by a joint implementation group chaired by the Minister of Justice and co-chaired by the UNMIL Special Representative, the Minister of Finance and Development Planning, the Minister of Defence, the United States Ambassador and an associate justice of the Supreme Court. While the security transition plan targets Liberia's assumption of tasks currently still performed by UNMIL, it also addresses gaps across the security sector in areas such as achieving greater operational effectiveness, improving management skills, reducing corruption and increasing public confidence through stronger oversight, accountability and professionalization. The plan recognizes that a successful security transition requires a whole-of-Government undertaking, with sustained political will at the highest levels.

I have urged the Government to include the justice and security sectors in post-Ebola recovery planning. Liberia's draft economic stabilization and recovery plan acknowledges the need for greater resilience in the security sector, but foresees the financing of security needs as coming primarily from the national budget. With the security transition plan currently estimated at $76 million through June 2016 alone, this may prove difficult.

The United Nations commends Liberia for meeting its initial benchmarks under the security transition plan. Since the report of the Secretary-General went to print, further benchmarks have been met. On 21 April, Liberia became the tenth African country to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty. In March, the Liberian National Commission on Small Arms, together with UNMIL, delivered a first tranche of training on arms marking and registration for more than two dozen staff from a broad cross-section of the security agencies — the armed forces, the national security agency, the executive protection service, the Liberia National Police (LNP) and the immigration service — ahead of the June timeline envisaged in the security transition plan. I hope to see the Government's weapons-marking process begin by the end of this month, and the new draft standard operating procedure, containing minimum standards for weapons-marking, to be formalized this week.

On 1 June, UNMIL's Bangladeshi engineers will start refresher training for the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) on explosive remnants of war (ERW), following previous training by the United Nations Mine Action Service. That will equip the AFL to take over responsibility on 1 July for ERW in 11 of Liberia's 15 counties. UNMIL and the AFL will continue to work closely on the hand-over in the remaining four counties.

On 16 April, a riot broke out in the Red Light area of Paynesville, just east of Monrovia, when a motorcyclist died following a confrontation with the National Police. In a single 12-hour period, three motorcyclists died in encounters in Monrovia allegedly involving members of the security forces. That fresh tension followed previous complaints of police brutality. The Paynesville disturbances left civilians and police officers injured and resulted in significant property damage, including to five police posts, one of which was destroyed. UNMIL, which placed a formed police unit on standby and remained in close touch with the LNP, conducted its own response review and proposed to the LNP a joint review of how the situation was managed.

On 1 May, President Johnson-Sirleaf dismissed three senior LNP officers, including some who had been the subject of complaints of serious misconduct and abuse of power. Their replacements, nominated by the Minister of Justice, came up through the ranks of the LNP. One benefitted from the management-training programme at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration in 2014, facilitated by UNMIL and funded by Irish Aid. The President also instructed that the LNP's dormant Change Management Committee be reconstituted, a benchmark from the transition plan ambitiously set for this past March. Those are steps towards professionalizing and depoliticizing the LNP, as UNMIL has consistently advocated.

On Armed Forces Day in February, keynote speaker and former Minister Kofi Woods called on the AFL to return to West Point, Monrovia, to engage in civic works, as an act of reconciliation. At the request of elders and other representatives of the West Point community, unarmed AFL soldiers have worked alongside community volunteers to rebuild and transform the public school, which had been used as an Ebola treatment centre before being badly damaged during the disturbances last August. The LNP have also joined the effort, which has been supported by the United Nations and Liberian and international non-governmental organizations. The school will reopen next week.

Ebola highlighted Liberia's underlying fragility. Beyond the public health crisis, Liberians were angered by the Government's initial slow response and by the rising cost of basic commodities, while the use of the Armed Forces and the introduction of a State of emergency also fuelled fears, as I described (see S/PV.7260) to the Council on 9 September last year. It is remarkable that, eight months later, it is Liberia, among the three affected countries, that appears poised to be declared Ebola-free.

Liberians came together and showed themselves resilient. Now is the time to address factors that contributed to Ebola's spread, in particular weak social-service delivery, the lack of accountability and overly centralized Government. Liberia's extractives-based, enclave economy also proved highly vulnerable to the shock of Ebola, compounded by the sharp drop in global prices for iron ore and rubber.

The Government's early steps towards security transition at the county level, as part of the security

transition plan, are part of a historic reform in deconcentrating service delivery; and, over the last two months, more county security councils have been activated. They are intended as an early warning mechanism and a forum for local dispute-resolution. Along with the existing and planned justice and security hubs, the county security councils can strengthen coordination between security agencies and local authorities. There will of course be challenges for local authorities in getting the councils to operate effectively in the early period, but that will improve as support grows for deconcentrated services and operations.

There are promising developments in addressing corruption, with the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission undertaking major investigations in respect of State-owned enterprises. Steady political will is needed to support those processes, particularly as investigations move into higher levels of Government. Audits by the General Audit Commission, including of the National Ebola Task Force, have drawn attention to financial-management weaknesses. Other efforts towards transparency include the Open Government Partnership and the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. All can contribute to greater confidence in the State and improved service-delivery to its citizens.

Ebola threatened to deepen Liberia's long-standing societal divisions, still not healed from years of conflict. Reconciliation remains a work in progress. As the Secretary-General said recently, "Justice is essential ... We have to address past violations to secure a stable future." The national dialogue about social exclusion and about the crimes of the past, remains muted at best.

Liberia's stability also depends on that of the subregion. A recent border shooting incident reminds us of the potential for tension along the border with Côte d'Ivoire. In that regard, with the resumption of the quadripartite and associated bilateral processes, the cooperation between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire is encouraging. With presidential elections anticipated in both Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire this October, there is a particular need to maintain strong cooperation across the subregion.

Domestically and within the diaspora, Liberia's next presidential election, in 2017 — a political milestone — is already hotly debated. Much will be at stake in 2017, and the political environment is increasingly intense. For its part, the international community, including the United Nations, must consider how to frame its own support, including its peacekeeping presence, in the post-Ebola context in order to build on positive developments and opportunities that arose from the crisis and to prevent a reversal in Liberia's gains. After 12 years of providing support to Liberia, UNMIL remains a reassuring presence to Liberians and investors alike, a deterrent to potential violence and a mentor and standby support to the Liberia National Police. As shown in Paynesville, the country continues to harbour flashpoints of intercommunal disputes and community dissatisfaction related to land and concessions. And those are among potential triggers that can adversely affect the political climate.

As I prepare to step down as Special Representative of the Secretary-General in July, I would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Council for the trust shown in asking me to head three peace operations in succession — in Nepal, Burundi and Liberia — over some six and a half years. It has been an extraordinary privilege. Today is six years to the day since my initial briefing to the Council (see S/PV.6119), whose tremendous engagement has never wavered. Sadly, Burundi and Nepal are both in the headlines, each meriting our deep collective reflection on the pace and impact of post-conflict stabilization.

I want to thank the Government of Liberia, and Ambassador Marjon Kamara personally, for our productive relationship. Not only with the Government, but with Liberians in every walk of life, I have found a welcome and an openness that has made living and working in that country a rare privilege. I would like to thank the Peacebuilding Commission, an invaluable dialogue partner, and all UNMIL's international partners. Finally, my heartfelt respect and gratitude goes to my colleagues across the United Nations, in particular the national, international and volunteer personnel in the field, without whose support, day after day, none of this work would have been possible.

The President: I thank Ms. Landgren for her briefing, and particularly for tailoring it to the crisis at hand.

I now give the floor to Mr. Skoog.

Mr. Skoog: Congratulations to you, Madam President. It is really a thrill to see you and Lithuania acceding to the presidency of the Council this month.

I have a few points to make on behalf of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Liberia configuration.

First, as Special Representative of the Secretary-General Karin Landgren just pointed to us with regard to the very significant Ebola situation, if no new cases are reported, Liberia will officially be declared Ebola-free this Saturday, 9 May. But this is not the time to lower our guard. Focused efforts will still be needed to ensure that Liberia stays at zero, including by improving basic health-care services in rural communities. High-level international attention must also be maintained to ensure that the broader recovery process can bring tangible improvements to the people of Liberia as quickly as possible.

Having been elected Chair in early March, I travelled to Liberia from 5 to 7 April to get a first-hand impression of the situation on the ground. The purpose of that visit was to draw lessons from the crisis and to see how the Peacebuilding Commission could best support peacebuilding priorities in the Ebola recovery and in the transition processes of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). I have shared my report with the Council in advance, but let me take this opportunity to highlight three points.

First, there is an urgent need to improve the socioeconomic situation in Liberia. This includes increasing access to primary education, deploying social safety nets and creating employment opportunities for youth. The conditions were already dire before the crisis, with 64 per cent of the population living below the poverty line and only 34 per cent of children attending primary school. The situation has now further deteriorated as a result of the Ebola situation. The crisis has increased the burden on households and destroyed the livelihoods of many, in particular women and young people engaged petty trade. Providing opportunities, especially for young people and women, is a critical priority for ensuring future peace and stability. The swift recovery of the economy, including through the resumption of cross-border trade, the return of international flights and economic stimulus, will be key to these efforts.

Secondly, there is a need to address State-society relations and trust in State institutions. A major part of this is to focus more on strengthening accountability, legitimacy and institutional capacity, including through empowering the various independent commissions. This also includes enhancing State presence and capacity to deliver basic services in the communities as part of the decentralization process. As UNMIL draws down and turns over security responsibility, targeted efforts must be made to strengthen the justice and security sectors, including the software of security, and to improve civilian-security relations.

But State capacity is not enough to build trust; continuing to deal with some of the outstanding grievances from the civil war, including by accelerating the implementation of the National Reconciliation Roadmap in an inclusive manner, will also be critical. This will be important not least in the context of starting to prepare for peaceful and credible elections in 2017. It is important in this regard to continue to empower women and to guarantee their full and equal participation in the electoral process, noting that the percentage of women in the Legislature decreased in the latest senatorial elections.

Thirdly, there is a need for a stronger regional perspective and approach. The Ebola crisis has clearly demonstrated that what happens in one country in the region has a direct impact on the others. The crisis has given new impetus to regional cooperation. The decision of the Mano River Union leaders to join efforts in a regional Ebola recovery plan should be welcomed and supported. Such regional cooperation, including at the highest level, will also be important for the future maintenance of regional peace and security. Relevant regional initiatives and organizations deserve greater attention and support, and we should more systematically consult and coordinate with these organizations as we frame our own engagement.

The priority for the Peacebuilding Commission is to safeguard that peacebuilding gains can be sustained and strengthened. Close coordination with the Security Council will be important in the coming months to help ensure a responsible and seamless transition of UNMIL, including by coordinating with relevant Ebola recovery efforts and helping to mobilize support and resources for the Government transition plan.

The Ebola crisis exposed how volatile the situation in Liberia still is. But it also demonstrated the determination and resilience of the people of Liberia. The success that we hope to celebrate on 9 May is much thanks to Liberian political, religious and traditional leaders uniting in collective action. We should build on this experience and seize the opportunity for change as we take the next steps in support of a peaceful and prosperous Liberia.

The President: I thank Mr. Skoog for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Republic of Liberia.

Mr. Sannoh (Liberia): It is an honour and privilege for me to address the Security Council as it considers the twenty-ninth progress report (S/2015/275) of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

Liberia has come a long way since the end of the conflict, forging ways and means to address the root causes and consequences of the civil conflict in a comprehensive and holistic manner so as to consolidate peace, promote national reconciliation and create an enabling environment for political, economic and social development in Liberia. Significant progress has been made in this regard under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, but we must remain ever mindful that Liberia would not be where we are today without the tireless support of the international community. I should therefore like to express my thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General, the successive members of the Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and the members of the Liberia configuration, as well as all other bilateral and multilateral partners, for the support that they have given us over the years.

Let me also register the appreciation of the Government of Liberia for the work of the United Nations Mission in Liberia and the leadership demonstrated by Ms. Karin Landgren, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, during her tour of duty. Both the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Ambassador Olof Skoog of Sweden, Chairman of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, have commented eloquently and truthfully on the situation in Liberia, the challenges that we face as a nation and people, and the need for international support. We could not agree more.

The Secretary-General's report fairly represents the situation in Liberia as of 15 April. However, some of the concerns raised and the incidents reported do not give a holistic picture of the situation in Liberia and appear more to be isolated events, which the Government has not condoned.

The first is the issue of corruption. The lapses mentioned in regard to corruption and impunity in Liberia are more a manifestation of capacity challenges than a lack of political will to fight this menace. It could be recalled that the President in her most recent address to the Legislature urged it to amend the act establishing the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission so as to give the Commission full prosecutorial powers. What is not being said is that prosecuting corruption cases requires capacity and resources that are not readily available. Hence the Ministry prioritizes cases that have pervasive impact, such as the National Oil Company case involving the bribing of legislators, the illegal issuance of logging contracts involving officials of the Forestry Development Authority, and the National Drug Service of the Ministry of Health, among others. An Anti-Corruption Division staffed by experienced and seasoned prosecutors is in the process of being established in the Ministry of Justice; when fully operational, it will speed up the prosecution of cases of corruption. New legislation is also being drafted to establish an additional court dedicated to cases of corruption.

The Government is currently working on decongesting the police beyond Montserrado county into the counties so that the level of deployment is linked to population ratio. Concerns about police brutality are troubling. The Professional Standards Division of the Liberia National Police routinely investigates acts of police misconduct and disciplinary actions, including dismissals and prosecution, are taken. The Transnational Crimes Unit, which includes representatives from all the security agencies, is functional although the meeting of its Board remains erratic. The Minister of Justice has directed the Board to meet regularly. The Government has also embarked on vigorous steps to reform the Liberia National Police and instil discipline and professionalism among its rank and file. Four senior police officers were recently dismissed by the President in this regard. Two separate independent probes are currently in progress involving allegations of police misconduct, which may warrant criminal prosecution.

The review and reform of the laws relating to the security sector is a dynamic and ongoing process. The draft police act was recalled by my office with the view to providing a clear direction on a number of policy issues. This exercise is expected to be completed by the end of this month, and thereafter submitted to the President for onward transmission to the legislature. The draft firearms act is still in the Legislature, and we are informed that it will soon be passed into law.

On the human rights situation, the Government does not condone violations by any of its institutions and remains committed to fulfilling its obligations under local and international law. The Government

routinely investigates incidents of human rights violations and abuses, and, consistent with due process, brings those responsible to justice. The events referred to in the report of the Secretary-General, including in particular the use of excessive force in the violent clash between the community of West Point and the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) during the state of emergency, was an isolated incident that the Independent National Commission on Human Rights swiftly investigated. The Commission's findings did not conclude that the AFL was responsible for the shooting, so no criminal investigation was triggered.

We recognize the need to establish a military tribunal consistent with the uniform code of military justice, which the Government is working on, but the fact that criminal proceedings did not result from the incident was not due to the absence of such a tribunal. Other procedures exist that allow for AFL soldiers to be prosecuted in civilian courts if found responsible for criminal misconduct involving civilians.

Regarding the media, there is no restriction on or prior censorship of the press in Liberia. However, the media are not above the law but remain subject to it, so much so that where there is a clear and deliberate violation of the laws of Liberia by journalists or media institutions, the Government has a duty to bring those responsible to justice in order to preserve the integrity of the law and for the greater good of society.

Sexual and gender-based violence remains a challenge, even in spite of an increase in prosecutions and long prison terms. What is now clear is that criminal justice alone cannot address the challenge. In addition to prosecutions, we must now look at other factors, including sociological and cultural dimensions, and embark on concerted efforts through sensitization to fight this scourge. The Government is committed to this process.

The Government also remains committed to concluding the constitution review process in a way that further contributes to rather than undermines Liberia's peacebuilding efforts and respect for freedom of religion. We recognize the slow pace of the implementation of the Palava Hut programme as part of the road map for national healing, peacebuilding and reconciliation, but we nonetheless remain committed to fully implementing the programme.

In response to resolutions 2190 (2014) and 2215 (2015), which call on the Government of Liberia to assume fully its complete security responsibilities from UNMIL no later than 30 June 2016, and for UNMIL to resume its drawdown, the Government, in close collaboration with UNMIL and partners, has formulated a concrete plan, with timelines and benchmarks, for building the capacity of the security sector to assume those responsibilities.

However, the plan formulated by the Government goes beyond the UNMIL transition. It is a peace consolidation strategy designed not only to assume responsibilities from UNMIL but also to consolidate the gains made over the years, and to address the remaining challenges that pose a threat to the peace and security of the country in a more structured manner. The plan has now been disaggregated along these lines.

The plan emphasizes, among other underlying benchmarks, a holistic Government approach for both ownership and implementation, focusing on State and human security; efficiency, transparency and accountability; democratic and civilian oversight; and coordination, collaboration and partnerships within the security sector and among Liberia and its regional and law-enforcement partners.

The plan also calls for capacity-building and for key legal and regulatory policies and frameworks to be strengthened and established where they do not exist, and calls for the review and enactment of legal frameworks, including passage of the police act and the firearms act, among others. The plan is incorporated into the post-Ebola recovery programme.

The implementation of the plan is costed at $104.8 million, spread over a period of three or more years. While the plan recognizes that it is the responsibility of the Government of Liberia to mobilize the required amount, it also emphasizes the need for increased donor support to the security sector, given the enormity of the challenges.

In March 2014, the deadly Ebola virus disease struck Liberia, revealing several vulnerabilities across the service-delivery systems, especially the health-care system. I would like to report that with the robust support of the United Nations and the global community, matched at the national level by strong leadership and a resilient people, Liberia is now on the verge of being declared an Ebola-free society.

Liberia has developed an economic stabilization and recovery plan to address a number of the vulnerabilities revealed by the Ebola virus and a subregional plan

with Sierra Leone and Guinea. The Government very much looks forward to a continued partnership with the United Nations and the global community, so as to reach zero infections and to sustain an Ebola-free Liberia and subregion.

The steep decline in the Liberian economy due to the Ebola crisis remains the greatest inhibiting factor for the Government in terms of delivering services to its people. The situation will continue to have an impact on all sectors, especially the justice and security sector. The Government will continue to exert efforts to improve socioeconomic conditions, especially among restive youth; strengthen relations between the State and society; and build trust and confidence among the citizenry, the Government and its institutions.

Finally, Liberia remains committed to its obligations under the statement of mutual commitment with the Peacebuilding Commission, and we will continue to forge increased engagement with the members of the configuration in order to solidify peace in Liberia, especially given that the pace of resource mobilization in support of Liberia has slowed considerably in recent years. The Government emphasizes that support for the peacebuilding architecture of the United Nations is particularly critical during the process of transition in Liberia.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.40 p.m.